Term Paper Requirements

There are two options to satisfy the requirements of this subject:

1. 9 credits: A paper of about 10 to 15 pages: Based on a topic discussed in lectures.
2. 12 credits: A paper of about 18 to 25 pages: Research topic chosen by student.

Term Paper Time Table

Stage One

Prepare proposal -- one or two pages in length - outlining the content of the proposed paper, including sources consulted. (Indicate 9 or 12 units). Week 8.

Stage Two

Sign up to meet with instructor. Week 10.

Stage Three


Term Paper Subject

Among the most disappointing papers have been those that have stuck to description of cities, or parts of cities, without pinning these descriptions to some hypothesis or argument. It is possible, of course, to derive hypotheses from interesting data, if you keep on developing categories for understanding the data and finally say something valuable about it all. In social science, this is often called "grounded theory." More commonly one has a hypothesis -- a puzzling question, an unexplored problem, a curious relationship -- and finds the appropriate data to validate (or not) the hypothesis. Whichever way you choose to work -- inductively or deductively -- the intellectual structure should be based on argument, be linked, and be as clear as possible. Remember that designing is a valuable mode of inquiry, and that, as architects, many of you have or should have valuable design skills which you can bring to bear in a paper for this subject.

There are many valid, unexplored topics in line with the general exploration of the subject, i.e., what are theories of the form of cities which deal with both their spatial, experienced form, and the social environment of these forms. Here are some which students have pursued in the past:

Case Studies of Cities

Case studies of cities in which it is possible to demonstrate specific relationships between form and society, either today or historically. Often these relationships are clearer under conditions of dramatic change, as in the change from colonial to post-colonial cities, or in
the reaction of urban society to sudden stress. Here the problem is often one of finding the data, but Boston and Cambridge have good libraries, if you can do the digging. Examples:


Ebbe, K. "Freedom to Control: City Form as an Expression of Colonial Domination." (Leopoldville and Kinshasha), 1978.


Morse, S. "Urban Form for Rural Development: Colonization in the Brazilian Amazon." 1981.


Switzky, J. "The Instant City of San Francisco and Theories on the Form of 'Boomtowns'." 2000.


Gillespie, J. "Las Vegas: Mythical Frontier Oasis or Paradigmatic American City?" 2002.


More deeply-researched aspects of a topic which has been discussed in the class lectures. Here the task is to examine an aspect of a topic critically, to solidify vague but provocative notions, or to use the paper to strengthen your own interest in a special area. You either have to find more detailed information, or be able to arrange arguments in a different way. Examples:


Nielsen, B. "The Other Side: Gender-based Theories of City Form." 1986.


Kumar, S. "The 'Non-City' and City Form." 1991.

Vernooy, A. "Polynuclear Cities: Crisis in Form or Perception." 1991.


Form Issues of Today

Form issues of today which are worth writing about because they represent a new or innovative idea, are part of an important current debate, or interesting because you can get close to events as they are unfolding. The trick is to avoid gross generalities and to do more than a piece of urban journalism. Examples:


Mukhija, V. "Whose City is it? A Lefebvrian Critique of Delhi." 1996.


How Institutions Affect the Form of the City, or Vice Versa
How institutions affect the form of the city, or vice versa. These are generally topics which require a careful examination of an institution and a way of modeling it, a way of conceptualizing the physical environment, and finally, a good explanation of how these fit together. Or the order can be reversed. These are not easy tasks. Some hold strong opinions about these kinds of subjects: for example, how tall office towers represent exploitation of land and human resources, but seldom demonstrate these relationships convincingly. Examples:


Yi, E-S. "The Urban Logic and the Qibla." 1995.

Mani, M. "Shifting Paradigms and the Influence of Temporal Authority on City Form: A Study of Hyderabad, India." 1996.


Kim, D. "How to Make a Straight Line into a Square: An Examination of Central Square." 2000.


